

Message Text

SECRET

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AMEMBASSY JAKARTA
AMEMBASSY KUALA LUMPUR
AMEMBASSY MANILA
AMEMBASSY MOSCOW
USLO PEKING
AMEMBASSY SINGAPORE
AMEMBASSY RANGOON
AMEMBASSY TAIPEI
AMEMBASSY TOKYO
AMEMBASSY VIENTIANE

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LIMDIS

CINCPAC FOR POLAD

E.O. 11652: XGDS-2
TAGS: PFOR CH VN US UR
SUBJECT: SINO-VIETNAMESE RELATIONS

1. SUMMARY: THE PRC IS AMBIVALENT ON THE QUESTION OF US-SRV
RELATIONS. TO THE EXTENT OUR PRESENCE WOULD COUNTERBALANCE
SOVIET INFLUENCE, THE PRC MIGHT WELCOME US-SRV NORMALIZATION.
BUT PEKING PROBABLY ALSO BELIEVES THAT US-SRV RELATIONS WOULD
TEND TO REDUCE THEIR OWN INFLUENCE WITH HANOI. ONE INEVITABLE
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RESULT OF US-SRV NORMALIZATION WOULD BE INCREASED PRESSURE
FROM PEKING FOR MORMALIZATION OF US-PRC RELATIONS. WE SEE
LITTLE LIKELIHOOD, HOWEVER, THAT PEKING WOULD MODIFY ITS BASIC
PRINCIPLES FOR NORMALIZATION AS A RESULT OF ANY ACTION WE
MIGHT TAKE WITH VIETNAM. END SUMMARY.

2. INTRODUCTION: WITH THE COMPLETION OF THE WOODCOCK MISSION

TO HANOI, THE PROSPECTS FOR NORMALIZATION OF US-SRV RELATIONS ARE A SUBJECT OF MAJOR INTEREST TO THE PRC. US RECOGNITION OF HANOI WOULD HAVE SIGNIFICANT IMPLICATIONS NOT ONLY FOR OUR BILATERAL RELATIONS WITH THE PRC BUT ALSO FOR PEKING'S ASSESSMENT OF THE UNITED STATES' ROLE IN SOUTHEAST ASIA. THIS MESSAGE EXAMINES, FROM THE PRC POINT OF VIEW, THE IMPACT OF SUCH AN ACTION, PARTICULARLY GIVEN THE PRESENT AND RELATIVELY CONSTANT SOURCES OF FRICTION IN SINO-VIETNAMESE RELATIONS.

THE CURRENT STATE OF PRC-SRV RELATIONS

3. A MAJOR IRRITANT IN RELATIONS BETWEEN PEKING AND HANOI IS THE PRESENT VIETNAMESE "TILT" TOWARD THE SOVIET UNION. SOVIET AID TO VIETNAM IN 1976 WAS APPROXIMATELY DOUBLE THAT OF PRC, AND THE MASSIVE SOVIET PRESENCE IN VIETNAM IS UNDOUBTEDLY A MATTER OF CONCERN TO PEKING. HANOI HAS CONSISTENTLY ALIGNED ITSELF WITH THE SOVIET UNION ON FOREIGN POLICY MATTERS AND IS PROBABLY VIEWED IN PEKING AS AN INSTRUMENT FOR THE EXTENSION OF SOVIET INFLUENCE IN SOUTHEAST ASIA. THE MOST RECENT ILLUSTRATION OF CONTINUING CLOSE SOVIET-VIETNAMESE TIES WAS THE RECENTLY COMPLETED MISSION BY DEFENSE MINISTER GIAP TO MOSCOW. IN CONTRAST, THE MOST SENIOR VIETNAMESE OFFICIAL TO VISIT CHINA SINCE THE DEATH OF CHAIRMAN MAO LAST SEPTEMBER WAS DU MOI THE LOWEST RANKING MEMBER OF THE SRV POLITBURO.

4. INTERNAL SRV DISSENSION OVER THE BALANCE OF RELATIONS BETWEEN MOSCOW AND PEKING MAY ALSO HAVE RESULTED IN A DECLINE IN THE INFLUENCE OF PRO-CHINESE ELEMENTS OF THE LAO
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DONG PARTY. RECENTLY, A SENIOR NCNA REPORTER IN HONG KONG NOTED TO A CONGEN OFFICER AS A REASON FOR CONCERN THE FACT THAT ALL PAST AND PRESENT VIETNAMESE AMBASSADORS TO PEKING WERE PURGED DURING THE VIETNAMESE PARTY CONGRESS LAST DECEMBER. THE CHINESE MAY VIEW THIS AS EVIDENCE OF A FURTHER GROWTH OF MOSCOW'S INFLUENCE.

5. ANOTHER POINT OF FRICTION INVOLVES THE TWO COUNTRIES' CLAIMS TO THE PARACEL, SPRATLY AND OTHER ISLANDS IN THE SOUTH CHINA SEA. AS RECENTLY AS MARCH 15, THE PRC REASSERTED ITS CLAIM TO THE SPRATLY ISLANDS, STATING THAT IT WOULD "RECOVER" THEM. LAST JUNE, A PRC FOREIGN MINISTRY STATEMENT SPECIFICALLY OBJECTED TO OIL EXPLORATION BY OTHER COUNTRIES IN THE SPRATLY AREA. THE PRC HAS A LAND RIG ON THE PARACELS AND HAS RECENTLY PURCHASED FROM SINGAPORE TWO OFF-SHORE OIL RIGS WHICH ARE LIKELY DESTINED FOR USE IN THE SOUTH CHINA SEA. IN ADDITION, THE PRC IS ALREADY CARRYING OUT SEISMIC STUDIES IN THE GULF OF TONKIN, AN AREA WHICH, ALONG WITH THE SINO-VIETNAMESE BORDER, INVOLVES TERRITORIAL CLAIMS BY BOTH SIDES.

6. PRC REPRESENTATIVES ABROAD HAVE DEMONSTRATED PEKING'S CONCERN ABOUT THE EXPANSION OF HANOI'S INFLUENCE IN SOUTHEAST ASIA, AND THE CHINESE UNDOUBTEDLY WOULD REACT NEGATIVELY TO ANYTHING THAT WOULD ENHANCE THAT INFLUENCE. THIS CONCERN IS MOST CLEARLY DEMONSTRATED IN THAILAND WHERE SINCE THE FORMATION OF THE NEW MILITARY-BACKED GOVERNMENT IN BANGKOK LAST OCTOBER, CHINESE AND VIETNAMESE PROPAGANDA TREATMENT OF THE NEW REGIME HAS BEEN MARKEDLY DIFFERENT. HANOI HAS HURLED A STEADY STEAM OF CRITICISM AT THE THAI MILITARY GOVERNMENT WHILE IN CONTRAST, THE CHINESE HAVE REFRAINED FROM PROPAGANDA ATTACKS AND PRIVATELY HAVE REASSURED THE THAIS OF CONTINUING SUPPORT. IN INDOCHINA, THE CHINESE ARE USING THEIR INFLUENCE IN CAMBODIA TO URGE THE LEADERSHIP THERE TO MAINTAIN AN INDEPENDENT STANCE, WHILE THE VIETNAMESE PREDOMINATE IN LAOS AND HAVE HELPED OPEN IT UP TO A SOVIET PRESENCE. OVERALL, WHILE THE CHINESE MAINTAIN A CORRECT SECRET

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RELATIONSHIP WITH THE VIETNAMESE, THEIR INTERESTS ARE FAR FROM IDENTICAL AND THE INJECTION OF A US PRESENCE INTO VIETNAM WOULD HAVE SERIOUS RAMIFICATIONS FOR THE CHINESE.

PROBABLE PRC ATTITUDE TO US NORMALIZATION WITH THE SRV

7. THE PRC WOULD PROBABLY HAVE A MIXED REACTION TO THE ESTABLISHMENT OF A US PRESENCE IN VIETNAM. TO THE EXTENT THAT NORMALIZATION OF US-SRV RELATIONS WOULD CONTRIBUTE TO BALANCING SOVIET INFLUENCE, ESPECIALLY WITH REGARD TO ECONOMIC ASSISTANCE, PEKING MIGHT WELCOME IT. HOWEVER, THE ISSUE CUTS BOTH WAYS, AND TO THE DEGREE THAT HANOI'S RELATIONSHIP WITH THE UNITED STATES WOULD ENHANCE VIETNAM'S INFLUENCE IN SOUTHEAST ASIA AND ITS ABILITY TO LIMIT CHINESE INFLUENCE THE MOVE WOULD BE VIEWED WITH SUSPICION BY THE PRC. WHILE PEKING UNDOUBTEDLY VIEWS THE US PRESENCE IN VIETNAM AS UNDERSIRABLE, IT MAY WELL FEEL THAT IT IS MANAGEABLE OVER THE LONG TERM AND THE PROSPECT OF INCREASING "SUPER POWER" CONTENTION ON ITS SOUTHERN DOORSTEP WOULD NOT BE WELCOME.

8. DESPITE THE FRICTIONS EXISTING BETWEEN PEKING AND HANOI, THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE TWO REMAINS OFFICIALLY CORRECT, AND PEKING COULD NOT OPENLY OPPOSE US-SRV NORMALIZATION. NEVERTHELESS, SHOULD IT OCCUR WHEN THERE ARE NO VISIBLE SIGNS OF SUBSTANTIVE FORWARD MOTION IN THE NORMALIZATION OF US-PRC RELATIONS THE ACTION WOULD PROBABLY BE RESENTED. AS A SENIOR PRC REPRESENTATIVE RECENTLY STATED IN HONG KONG, HE COULD NOT UNDERSTAND WHY THE US WAS MOVING SO QUICKLY VIS-A-VIS VIETNAM WHILE SINO-US NORMALIZATION HAD NOT REALLY MOVED AHEAD IN RECENT YEARS. WHILE THIS MAY EXAGGERATE SOMEWHAT PRC CONCERNS, IT DOES INDICATE THE CHINESE ARE CAREFULLY

MONITORING THE PROGRESS OF US RELATIONS WITH HANOI AND
COMPARING IT WITH THEIR OWN BILATERAL RELATIONSHIP WITH THE
US.

9. ONE ALMOST INEVITABLE RESULT OF US-SRV NORMALIZATION

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WOULD BE INCREASED PRESSURE FROM PEKING FOR THE ESTABLISHMENT
OF US-PRC DIPLOMATIC RELATIONS. AS WE HAVE NOTED PREVIOUSLY
HOWEVER, THEIR ABILITY TO EXERT PRESSURE IS LIMITED. NEVERTHELESS
THERE IS LITTLE LIKELIHOOD THAT CHINA WILL ALTER ITS
BASIC PRINCIPLES FOR NORMALIZATION AS A RESULT OF ANY
ACTION THE UNITED STATES MIGHT TAKE IN VIETNAM.
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